United Nations E/CN.6/2001/NGO/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 February 2001

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-fifth session
6-16 March 2001
Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Thematic issues: women, the girl child and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

* * *

* E/CN.6/2001/1.

01-24101 (E) 130201

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, wishes to call to the attention of the Commission on the Status of Women the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on older women worldwide. The HIV/AIDS virus directly affects women, young and old, but older women, 60 years and older, continue to be an invisible population affected by the pandemic and are becoming increasingly isolated from society.

Women are the majority of the older population in almost every nation. According to the United Nations *World Population Prospects: 1998 Revision*, there are currently approximately 334 million older women worldwide, more than 18 per cent of the total world population. With changing demographics, there is likely to be an increasing number of older women living with the HIV/AIDS virus. The discrimination and the stigma of the disease itself are the main reasons why older women living with HIV/AIDS continue to be an invisible population. Disaggregated research pertaining to women over 50 years of age living with HIV/AIDS is practically non-existent. The lack of research only reinforces the invisibility of the socially excluded population.

AARP, with a current membership of over 33 million persons, has taken the initiative to educate their members on prevention of the HIV/AIDS virus and the myths surrounding the virus. HIV/AIDS does not discriminate on the basis of sexuality, gender, national origin, or age. Contrary to the myths of HIV/AIDS, women who continue to be sexually active as they become older and undergo natural physiological changes, become more susceptible to contracting HIV/AIDS.

Older women are also directly affected by the suffering and death of family members with the virus. At the end of 1999, there were 11.2 million AIDS orphans worldwide, 95 per cent of them living in sub-Saharan Africa. The grandparents are the main caregivers for many of the orphaned children and adult children suffering in the last stages of the AIDS virus. Older women are more likely than older men to be the ones responsible for the caregiving of the family member, and many must return to the work force to support the infected adult child or orphaned grandchild.

With increasing older populations and the implications of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is crucial that research on persons living with the HIV/AIDS virus be conducted on women of all ages. AARP supports research targeted specifically to the needs of older women living with HIV/AIDS and the needs of older women caring for family members with the virus.

AARP requests that the Commission on the Status of Women recognize the economic burden of older women caring for themselves and for family members with HIV/AIDS and promote national programmes that offer economic assistance to older women taking on the responsibility of caring for the victims of the virus. In addition, AARP urges the Commission to explore the potential of educating older women on the risks of the HIV/AIDS virus.